

9.
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
ORDINATION

Of the Reverend

Mr. JOSEPH SAUNDERS,

IN THE

Old Meeting-House, Cambridge,

OCTOBER 13, 1768.

By JOHN CONDER, D. D.

TOGETHER WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE,

By THOMAS TOWLE, B. D.

Mr. SAUNDERS's

CONFESSION OF FAITH,

AND A

CHARGE Delivered to Him

By EDWARD HITCHIN, B. D.

Published at the unanimous Request of the Church.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N:

Printed for E. and C. DILLY, in the Poultry,

MDCCLXVIII.

Price One Shilling.

S. E. R. M. G. N.

PREACHED AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE REVEREND

Mr. JOSEPH SAUNDERS

IN THE

Old Meeting House, Cambridge

OCTOBER 15, 1862.

By JOHN CAMPBELL, D. D.

TOGETHER WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE

By THOMAS L. H. F.



MR. S. A.

CONFESSOR OF FAITH

AND

Charge Delivered to Him

By EDWARD MITCHELL, B. D.

Published at the University Press of the University

THE SECOND EDITION

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. and C. D. in the Strand.

and

Price One Shilling



INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE,

By THOMAS TOWLE, B. D.

IT is a certain and glorious truth, that, the Lord Jesus Christ, having finished his work on earth, went up to Heaven, and lives there, even in the human nature, in a situation truly grand and exalted.—“ We,” who have the Christian revelation in our hands, see Jesus, who was for a little “ while * made lower than the angels, for the “ suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour †.” In our world, nothing is more common, than for persons, when raised to stations of dignity and power, to be unmindful, even of the very men for whom, when in lower circumstances, they had, and expressed, a great regard; accordingly, it may be supposed, that, whatever affection the divine Redeemer might entertain and discover for some of our race, while he appeared on earth, a mean, despised, persecuted man, he has and manifests no esteem for any of the apostate children of men, now he lives and reigns “ at “ the right hand of the Majesty on high ‡.” But, this supposition no way suits “ the great God our “ Saviour ||;” for, it is undoubtedly true, that, as he loved, and shewed his love to his people on earth, he has carried the same affection for them to the world of glory, and given as real discoveries of it, since his ascension and advancement there.

* Wolf. Curæ Philol. in loc.
i. 3. || Titus ii. 13.

† Heb. ii. 9.

Heb.

Indeed, his very last action in this world, shewed that he had a sincere and great value for his disciples; an inspired historian of his life assuring us, that, "while he blessed them," *i. e.* in the very act of blessing them, "he was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven *:" But did his love to them cease or abate on this endearing action? Certainly not: since his exaltation, he has given various evidences, that, his regard for his people still continues; continues, with equal sincerity; and with equal fervour. No sooner was he seated on his heavenly throne, than he sent down the Spirit: a truly noble expression of his love indeed! For, to that divinely glorious and gracious Agent were not only to be ascribed all those extraordinary gifts, with which the Christian church was at first honoured, but, to him are owing likewise all that light, love, holiness, and comfort, which have been, are, and shall be received in this apostate part of God's creation. Nor is this (important as this is) the only evidence, that, the ascended Redeemer's love to his people still remains with unabated ardour. Here a very large field indeed opens before us; the expressions of that amazing affection, of which I am speaking, being very numerous: however, I shall only at present hold up two instances of it to your view. The particulars I refer to, are, that, the illustrious personage I now speak of "is in the midst of the "golden candlesticks," and "has the stars in his "right hand †:" in other words, takes care of his churches, and preserves a succession of ministers to carry on his cause in those churches, whatever opposition be made to either, by open violence, or secret artifice. To these important

* Luke xxiv. 51.

† Rev. i. 13, 16.

and delightful evidences of the exalted Redeemer's love to his followers, we have a striking attestation in the solemnities of this day: for, what is the language of such a settlement as this, but, that, the Lord Jesus takes care of his churches, that, he continues a succession of ministers in them? With an admiration then of the Redeemer's grace, thus signally manifested, let us now address ourselves to the several particulars of this day's weighty transactions.

The work of this peculiarly sacred and important season proceeds on a supposition, that, the Church of Christ, which usually meets for religious worship in this place, have chosen our worthy brother, the Rev. Mr. Joseph Saunders, to be their pastor, and, that, he has consented to discharge the pastoral work among them; accordingly, it is very proper, that, on this occasion, both the call of the church, and Mr. Saunders's acceptance of it, should be publicly avowed and recognized.

Permit me, then, my Christian brethren of this church, to call on you, by one of your number, in the face of this assembly, to avow and recognize your invitation of the Rev. Mr. Joseph Saunders to be your pastor, and to acquaint us with the steps you have taken previous to that invitation. — Here a brother of the church spoke as follows :

“ Rev. Sir,

“ **I**F we take a review of the general history
 “ of the church of Christ throughout every
 “ period of time, we shall find it has been exer-
 “ cised with various changes ; now her situation
 “ exalted like the eagle's, anon sitting solitary

“ and disconsolate in the wilderness; whereby an
 “ infinitely wise and holy God has brought about
 “ the special purposes of his providence and
 “ grace, establishing this comfortable truth in
 “ the face of the whole world, namely, that his
 “ church is built upon a rock, and that the gates
 “ of hell, neither men nor devils, shall ever pre-
 “ vail against it. We of this afflicted church
 “ have particular reason this day to set up our
 “ Ebenezers afresh, and to say, hitherto the
 “ Lord hath helped us: blessed be his name!
 “ he has remembered us in our low estate, for
 “ his mercy endureth for ever. It having pleased
 “ the righteous Governor of the church to visit
 “ us with a very trying dispensation a few years
 “ since, which threatened our very being as a
 “ church, in these distressing circumstances we
 “ were led often to meet together in humble and
 “ earnest prayer, that the Lord would be pleased
 “ in the midst of judgment to remember mercy,
 “ and arise for our help. In this manner we con-
 “ tinued waiting for some time, still looking up
 “ to him who hath declared, For the cry of the
 “ poor, and the sighing of the needy, now will
 “ I arise; and who shall say, Be thou destroyed,
 “ broken down, and plucked up, when he saith,
 “ Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built?
 “ At length, after frequent meetings for prayer
 “ and conversation, and a consultation with our
 “ worthy and kind friends in London, the Rev.
 “ Mr. Saunders, who was just then about finish-
 “ ing his studies, was recommended to us as a
 “ serious, judicious young minister, whose gifts
 “ and furniture, under a divine blessing, pro-
 “ mised usefulness and acceptance. Accordingly
 “ he was prevailed on, better than two years
 “ since, to come down and preach to us; and
 “ from

“ from that specimen we were encouraged to sol-
 “ licit him to come down the following winter,
 “ for two months longer, in order to make ano-
 “ ther trial, and to see what might be the fur-
 “ ther openings of Providence in our favour.
 “ Which time being ended, he left us to return
 “ to London; though not before we had at our
 “ church meeting committed the case afresh to
 “ him that heareth prayer, and had agreed on a
 “ further application to him to come and preach
 “ to us for six, nine, or twelve months. Ac-
 “ cordingly application was made to him to come
 “ and preach to us for that time: and thus we
 “ left the affair with the Lord and his own heart,
 “ uncertain as to the issue; when in about a
 “ month he wrote us a letter, that after praying
 “ the matter over, and deliberating much upon it,
 “ he at last found his mind inclined to attend to
 “ our request as the voice of Providence, and
 “ that he would come and preach a-while among
 “ us. Accordingly in January, 1767, he came
 “ down and preached with encouraging accept-
 “ ance and usefulness till Midsummer following,
 “ when it pleased the Lord to visit him with a
 “ long and trying affliction, which even threat-
 “ ened his life; but he was in about three months
 “ restored to his ministerial work; and in the
 “ course of the following winter, his preaching
 “ and conversation, spirit and walk, meeting with
 “ the general esteem of the church and congre-
 “ gation; and there being a gradual increase of
 “ the auditory, and a steady uniform desire of his
 “ continuance; it was unanimously resolved, in
 “ the spring of this year, to give him an imme-
 “ diate call to pastordship: which being done,
 “ after two months, he acquainted us, that he
 “ thought it was his duty to accept of our in-
 “ vitation,

" vitation, that he might be serviceable to our
 " souls in the gospel of Christ. Here then we
 " would make a pause, and with holy admiration
 " and thankfulness say, Hath not the hand of the
 " Lord wrought all this! Upon this agreeable
 " change in our circumstances, arising from Mr.
 " Saunders's determination, he was desired to
 " procure his dismissal from that church of
 " Christ at London under the pastoral care of the
 " Rev. Mr. Hitchin, to which he stood related;
 " which request being complied with in a very ho-
 " nourable testimonial, he was received a member
 " with us, and the church have since renewed their
 " former call and invitation to him to undertake
 " the pastoral oversight of us in the Lord: to which
 " he has chearfully and affectionately returned
 " an answer of acceptance; and we, as a church,
 " have, with the same chearfulness and affection,
 " proceeded to receive and acknowledge him as
 " our pastor; and we have in concert appointed
 " this day to make a more publick declaration
 " of it before God, angels, and men, and to
 " recognize it in the presence of this venerable
 " assembly of ministers, and of our neighbouring
 " sister churches; that they may be witnesses of
 " our faith and order, and that we may also en-
 " joy their united prayers before the throne, that,
 " through a rich supply of the blessing and Spirit
 " of Christ, our pastor may be abundantly suc-
 " ceeded in his work; and that we may expe-
 " rience the presence and grace of God, and be
 " blest with the dews of heaven, the former and
 " the latter rain; that so we may revive as the
 " corn, and grow as the vine, and cast forth our
 " roots as Lebanon. And to this end we would
 " be uniting with heart and voice in that suit-
 " able and earnest petition of the psalmist, Make

“ us glad, O Lord, according to the days where-
 “ in thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein
 “ we have seen evil; let thy work appear unto
 “ thy servants, and thy glory unto their children;
 “ and let the beauty of the Lord our God be
 “ upon us; establish thou the work of our hands
 “ upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish
 “ thou it. Amen and Amen.”

Now, Rev. Sir, allow me to request you, in
 the hearing of this assembly, likewise to avow,
 and recognize your acceptance of the call of this
 church of Christ to discharge the work of a pastor
 among them, and, to lay before us, the steps you
 took, previous to that acceptance.

“ As a brother of the church, has just now
 “ been very particular in mentioning the lead-
 “ ings of providence respecting my first coming
 “ among them, as also for substance what has
 “ taken place since; how my mind has been
 “ overruled and inclined to continue with them,
 “ and at length to accept of their unanimous in-
 “ vitation to take the over-sight of them in the
 “ Lord:—All that seems requisite for me to add
 “ further here, is to testify thus publicly my
 “ ready and chearful compliance with the af-
 “ fectionate invitation of this church of Christ,
 “ believing, from several considerations, that in
 “ so doing, I am following the direction of divine
 “ providence.

“ I do then now most solemnly, after much
 “ serious deliberation and earnest prayer on this
 “ account as in the presence of God, the holy
 “ angels, and this whole assembly, give up my-
 “ self to this church, to serve them in the gospel
 “ of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Among the many expressive representations of a gospel-church in the divine word, this is one, that “it is the pillar and ground of the truth *;” in other words, that, like a pillar to which a proclamation is affixed, or a basis whereon a structure stands firm and stable, such a society displays and upholds the Christian doctrine, “that great “mystery of godliness †,” in the world. Now, a church of Christ may be said to do this, as in other ways, so especially by the constant dispensation of that doctrine in it; its dispensation in the ministry of the divine word, and celebration of holy ordinances.—Hence it appears, that, it should be the concern of such societies, that, those whom they call to “take the oversight of them ‡” be “sound in the faith ||,” that, they believe the several articles of divine revelation, have a persuasion of their truth, and a sense of their importance. Nor should the societies I refer to stop here, but, should make it evident to all around them, that, they are thus concerned, for the support and exhibition of religious truth among them.—And are these things incumbent on a gospel-church? surely, it is quite proper, that, on such solemnities as these, a minister separating to pastoral work, should be called on to make an open declaration of what he believes.—And, I cannot avoid taking this opportunity of observing, that, instead of declining or being unwilling to comply with such call, every minister of Christ should with pleasure attend to it, by delivering his thoughts on sacred subjects, not, in a few general or ambiguous expressions, but, as largely and clearly as he is able; so giving ground to conclude, that, in the course of his

* 1 Tim. iii. 15. † Ver. 16. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 2. || Titus
i. 13;

future ministry, he will “not walk in craftiness,
 “nor handle the word of God deceitfully; but,
 “by a manifestation of the truth, commend him-
 “self to every man’s conscience, in the sight of
 “God §.” Agreeably then to this ancient and
 laudable custom, I now, Rev. Sir, desire you to
 favour us with a confession of your faith.

MR. SAUNDERS’S CONFESSION OF FAITH.

AS this your request, Sir, is not only common
 on such solemn occasions as these; but as it
 is agreeable to scripture, and highly requisite, up-
 on several accounts, for the person ordained, pub-
 licly to make a profession of his faith;—I would,
 now, freely, and without reserve, before many
 witnesses, but yet, with the greatest seriousness,
 and reverence, as in the presence of God Al-
 mighty, give a summary account of those things,
 I most firmly believe upon the authority of scrip-
 ture, and which I fully intend, in the strength of
 divine grace, to make the subject of my future
 ministrations.

I. Since the existence of a God must be univer-
 sally allowed to be the foundation of all religion,
 I thus publicly testify my firm belief, that, there
 is one supreme, eternal, independent, and ne-
 cessarily existing Being, whom we properly call
 God.

II. I believe likewise, that, the light of nature,
 and the various stupendous works of creation,
 and providence around us, in such strong and

§ 2 Cor. iv. 2.

convincing

convincing language declare this fundamental truth, that, every rational creature is without excuse, when, from the evidence he has (by these means) of the being and perfections of God, he does not worship and glorify him accordingly.

III. But, though the light of nature, and the wonderful appearances around us plainly inform us of the existence of the supreme Being; yet, for a more clear and distinct knowledge of what God is in himself;—how he is to be worshipped;—what he requires of us;—and what he has done, or will do for us:—I believe, we are entirely beholden to a divine revelation;—and that, such a glorious revelation as this, God has been graciously pleased to give us of himself, in the volume of his word, or in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

IV. This sacred volume, I am fully persuaded, from a variety of strong and convincing evidences, is no crafty imposition or “cunningly devised fable,” obtruded upon us by the artifice of men; but “a most sure word of prophecy;” “given by inspiration of God;” having evidently the divine signature and stamp upon it.

V. I am well satisfied, further, that, these sacred writings contain a full discovery of the mind and will of God;—that, they inform us of every thing that is requisite for knowing, serving, and enjoying God;—that, they are, of themselves, a compleat rule of faith and practice, of every thing to be believed and performed, without any of the inventions, or traditions, of men, and, ought to be regarded as an invariable standard, by which to form, try, and regulate our sentiments,
in

in all matters of religion, in opposition to any private opinions, or public decrees of any person, or persons whatever, inconsistent with them.

VI. Upon the authority of scripture, I am led to believe, there is only one living and true God; — a spirit, possessed of all possible perfections; — of infinite wisdom, — almighty power, — inflexible justice, — unspotted holiness, — and inviolable truth: — and that, “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.”

VII. Upon the same divine authority, I believe further, that, in this infinitely glorious Being, or, in the Godhead, there are three persons, called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; — and, though, in scripture, they are distinguished, by personal characters, and distinct operations, and, each has ascribed to him the various perfections of DEITY; yet, am I well persuaded, they are not three distinct Gods, but one supreme Jehovah. — For, “there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and, these three are one,” the same in substance, equal in power, and glory.

VIII. As nothing can be the means of its production, or, the cause of its own existence, I am well satisfied, that, God created all things, visible, and invisible — that, He made the heavens and the earth, together with every living creature, both man, and beast, creeping thing, and flying fowl.

And, as I believe the great God made all things, at first, so, I am equally convinced, that, He sustains every thing, by the all-supporting energy of his providence; — that, He, by no means,

means, sits at the helm, as an idle spectator, but, carefully, and constantly, inspects, and governs, every distinct part of his creation, so that, the various minute occurrences, as well as the more important events, that take place in our world, are under the actual agency, or, wise permission of the Almighty, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will."

IX. I must express my full persuasion likewise, that, (according to scripture) God made all things "very good;"—that, He greatly distinguished, and blessed man, above other parts of the creation, with a reasonable and immortal spirit;—that, "He made him upright,"—"created him in his own image," perfectly holy:—with a clear knowledge of,—a sufficient power to keep,—and, a ready inclination to obey, the divine will.—Man being thus created, was, I believe, a perfectly happy, though, mutable creature.

X. We certainly have, further, an illustrious instance of God's great wisdom, and goodness, in the manner in which He was pleased to deal with man, in this his primitive state of rectitude and innocence, viz. in his entering into a covenant with him;—in which covenant it is evident, that, man (as a rational creature and free agent) was put upon a suitable trial of his obedience to his great Creator;—that, God was pleased to make the conditions easy to be complied with;—and that, He engaged to obedience, by the most important motives; alluring by promises, and at the same time, guarding against a revolt, by the most tremendous and alarming threatenings:—all which considerations plainly show us, in how

how eligible, and advantageous a situation, man was at first fixed.

XI. It appears to me, likewise, with full evidence from scripture, that, God (in his thus dealing with Adam) considered him, as the natural, and moral head, of all his posterity ;—and, that, Adam was placed in those circumstances (as has been just hinted) which rendered this highly reasonable and righteous ; yea, such that, every man himself could not but have approved of, had it been possible for the Creator to have consulted every individual of mankind herein.

XII. I am persuaded, further, from the divine word, that, notwithstanding the wise and gracious methods the great God took with Adam, to secure his obedience, yet, he wilfully and deliberately violated the law of his Maker,—turned rebel against his God,—lost his original innocence,—justly incurred the divine displeasure ; and, so fell under the force of that awful threatning, “ In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die : ” — which striking threatning, I believe, includes three sorts of deaths, death temporal, — spiritual—and eternal.

XIII. I have scripture, as well as other weighty reasons on my side, while, I testify my belief, that, “ by one man’s disobedience many were “ made or constituted sinners,” and, that, by the heinous offence of the first man, “ all the world is become guilty before God.”

XIV. In consequence of this, I am led to believe, (though, the consideration is solemn and
5 affecting)

affecting) that, all mankind are sunk into most dreadful and deplorable circumstances:—

As guilty creatures they are “the children of wrath,” under the curse of God’s holy law;

And, as depraved, and degenerate creatures, they are wholly inclined to that which is vile and sinful.—“Every thought and imagination of “their hearts is only evil continually.”—While we are in a state of nature, (I believe) there is an implacable enmity in our hearts to God and holiness;—we are neither able, nor willing to return to God, from whom we have fallen;—we are entirely “without hope”—nay, “without God in “the world.”—

In so dismal, and, deplorable a situation as this; shut up in the dark dungeon of despair, without the least glimmer of hope, it might justly have been expected, that, the great God would have for ever left the whole apostate, guilty race of Adam.—

But, “his ways and thoughts are not ours:” and therefore,

XV. I believe, that, God, out of his infinite tenderness, compassion, and love, from all eternity, chose some of our fallen race, to everlasting life and happiness;—and, (in order to the bestowment of this important blessing) entered into a most gracious covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ:—

In which covenant, God the Father stipulated with Christ his only begotten Son, for the whole elect world, and “gave to him those many sons “whom he, as the captain of our salvation, was “to bring to glory:”—

I believe, likewise, that, in this blessed covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ cheerfully complied with

with the terms proposed to him, and, readily undertook to be the Surety,—the Saviour,—the Redeemer,—the Advocate, and Mediator, of all those that were given to him by his Father.

XVI. That, the Son of God might accomplish this his glorious undertaking, as also, agreeable to the settlements of this everlasting covenant, I believe, “when the fulness of time was come.” “the” eternal “word was made flesh, and, “dwelt among us,” that, he took to himself a true body, and, reasonable soul; which human nature was so closely and inseparably united with his divine nature, as to form but one person, “Emmanuel, God with us.”

XVII. I am further persuaded, with the apostle, that, when “God sent forth his Son,” he was “made of a woman, made under the law,” the same law that his people had broke; — that, in his state of humiliation, he “was holy, harmless, “undefiled, and separate from sinners;” that, in due time, he suffered and died for us, and, that, not merely as a martyr, to confirm the truth of his doctrine, nor yet, as our leader merely to set us an example;—but, for far more important ends, viz. as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer, of his people; and, that, by his sufferings and death (for he did not die in vain) he has “purchased his church with his own blood,” and, opened a glorious way for the free and honourable bestowment of all spiritual blessings, upon all believers.

XVIII. The sacred writings inform me, further, that, as Christ “was delivered for our offences,” so he “was raised again for our justification,”

“ cation, ” agreeable to that lively prophecy of the Messiah, that “ God would not leave his soul in “ hell, nor suffer his holy One to see corruption.”

XIX. I am also well satisfied as to the reality of our Lord’s ascension into heaven in his human nature, and that, he is now “ seated at the right “ hand of God” in that nature, where he fulfils, in a glorious manner, the several important offices he sustains, as the Prophet, Priest, and King, of his church.

XX. The word of God informs me, that, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only hope and refuge of sinners,—the only foundation upon which guilty creatures can build for eternity;—“ there being “ salvation in no other, nor any other name “ given under heaven, among men, by which “ they can be saved:” and I believe, that this glorious Person is both “ able” and willing “ to “ save to the uttermost all that come unto God “ by him.”

XXI. I believe, that, as this great Redeemer is set forth as the only Saviour, that, he, according to his own injunction, is to be preached to “ every creature,” *i. e.* to all the apostate race of Adam, under all his various important titles, characters, offices, and benefits.

XXII. I learn from scripture, that all those who are really interested in the glorious blessings of the gospel, “ must be born again,” become “ new creatures,”—must be “ made partakers of “ the divine nature,”—must “ be renewed in the “ spirit of their minds;” which renovation of soul consists,

consists, in a change of temper and conduct, in a real hatred of all sin, and a love to universal holiness,—and is often spoken of in scripture as a conversion to God,—“a repentance unto life,”—an having “a new heart;”—and this divine change, I believe, is absolutely necessary, in order to our personal meetness for heaven and happiness, so that “without it no man shall see the Lord.”

XXIII. Nevertheless I am well persuaded, that, this mighty change cannot be effected, either in whole or in part, by human “might or power,” but “by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts:” and that, the same almighty power which was exerted in raising dead Lazarus out of his grave, must be exerted, in order to raise a soul from the death of sin to the life of holiness.

XXIV. But, notwithstanding, I believe, there are special duties that God expects sinners to be found in the discharge of, that, he is sincere in all his expostulations, exhortations, and commands, and that, finally impenitent sinners will be left inexcusable, for slighting the encouragement which the gospel gives, for neglecting the opportunities it affords, and for “quenching” and “resisting” the Spirit in his common strivings, and motions.

XXV. I believe, that, all who have received “the grace of God in truth,” and are savingly united to Christ by faith, are from thence delivered from condemnation,—accepted as righteous in God’s sight through Christ as their justifying righteousness,—brought into a state of peace and reconciliation with him,—and have also a sure title to eternal blessedness:—And, that, all

C

such

such will “yield up themselves to God, as those
 “who are alive from the dead; and their mem-
 “bers as instruments of righteousness to him;”
 and will in all things “be careful to maintain
 “good works.”

XXVI. I believe, that, true Christians are justified at and by believing, and that, this true, saving, justifying faith consists, not mainly in giving credit or assent to the bare report of the gospel, or, to the truth and reality of the whole of Christ’s work and undertaking, but rather, in having powerfully endearing, transforming, and, at times, appropriating views of Christ as our salvation;—in a cheerful reception of him, in his several characters and offices;—and, in a trusting to him, and venturing upon him, for all the soul wants for time or eternity.

XXVII. I believe, it is an incumbent duty upon the people of God, to follow the example of the primitive Christians, in “giving up themselves to the Lord” and to each other in a church relation;—and that, when a company of Christians are united together, by mutual consent, for spiritual improvement, and the “building up one
 “another in their most holy faith,” having the various ordinances of Christ’s appointment administered among them, and, walking together according to the rules of his gospel:—I believe, that, such a body of Christians is to be looked upon as a church of Christ.

XXVIII. I firmly believe, that, the Lord Jesus Christ is the alone King and Head of the church, and that He only has a right to give and appoint laws,—orders,—ordinances,—and officers, therein;—and, that, Christians, in every respect, are to

be submissive to his commands, directions, and injunctions, in opposition to all the traditions and impositions of men.

XXIX. Nevertheless I believe, that all such gospel churches are invested with a power, by and under Christ, for their mutual peace and comfort, to regulate all concerns respecting their church relation, both as to the choice of their officers, and the whole management of their members, according to rules Christ has given in his word.

XXX. I believe, that, Christ will have "a seed to serve him" in all succeeding ages; and, that, he will preserve and support his church till the important event of his second coming.

XXXI. I believe it to be the incumbent duty of Christians, when united together in a church relation, to attend upon all the ordinances of God's house;—to pray with and for one another;—to watch over one another;—to admonish and "forbear one another in love;"—to "do good, and not forget to communicate" to each others necessities;—to study the peace and edification of the church, and, the real good and prosperity of the different members thereof.

XXXII. I believe, further, that our great Redeemer has, very wisely and graciously, instituted two, and only two, sacraments in his church, baptism and the Lord's supper.—Baptism is an ordinance, wherein the washing with water, in "the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," does signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking the benefits of the covenant of grace, and

our engagement to be the Lord's, and, that, it ought to be administered to all who creditably profess "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," and to their children likewise.—The Lord's supper is also, I believe, a solemn institution of Christ, and should carefully be attended to, by true believers, till our Lord's second coming. This is agreeable to his own sacred injunction, and by this means his servants "shew forth his death till he comes." None, I apprehend, have any scripture right to approach the Lord's table, but such as give satisfactory evidence, to a church of Christ, of their real religion and vital godliness.

XXXIII. I own my firm belief, that, the soul of man is immortal, and, that, there is a future state of rewards and punishments, into which the departing spirit enters upon its separation from the body.—I am persuaded also, that, "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust," and, that, "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ."

XXXIV. I believe, finally, that, at that important period, there will be a righteous separation made, by the great Judge of all, "between the righteous and the wicked, between those who served God and those who served him not." Impenitent sinners will certainly then be bid to depart into everlasting burnings, while the righteous will hear that gracious invitation, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

Thus have I endeavoured, plainly and without the least disguise, to publish this day, before many

many witnesses, the principal heads of those important articles which I most firmly believe are contained in the sacred scriptures, and agreeable “to the faith once delivered to the saints.” I have only one thing more to add, and that is, to desire, not out of form, but in earnest, the prayers of all such present who are not strangers at “a throne of grace,” and who have the welfare of real religion at heart, that, these great truths may not only be assented to, but, that, I may embrace them cordially; view them in all their native beauty, divine harmony, and engaging lustre; live and feed upon them as a Christian; and declare them to others with all the faithfulness, affection, earnestness, and fervour of one who has powerfully felt their divine influence upon his own soul, as becomes a minister taught of God, and as is suited to truths so very interesting to the immortal souls of my fellow dying creatures.—Then may I hope, at last, to “finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”

Many thanks to you, my dear brother, for the good confession you have now made before the ever-blessed God, the holy angels, and this numerous assembly. Be assured, it is my sincere and affectionate desire, that, a blessing may attend the important relation which has this day publicly commenced between you and this Christian society.—May you, Sir, have an increasing acquaintance with every article of religious truth! May you experience much of its power and pleasure on your heart, as also manifest much of its sanctifying tendency throughout your life! May you be assisted in the dispensation of it, to this

church of Christ, yea, to all among whom you may be called to labour! And may your ministry be attended with real and great success. — Then will this church, then will all to whom God has blessed your labours, “rejoice in the day of Christ, that, you have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain*.” To this great end, may all concerned be assisted in, and, a divine blessing accompany and follow, the solemn proceedings of this day!

• Phil. ii. 16.

THE

T H E
C H A R G E

B Y

EDWARD HITCHIN, B. D.

DEAR BROTHER,

HAVING been witness to those solemn and mutual engagements you and the church of Christ meeting in this place have entered into, and the gospel obligations you are both under, I, with chearfulness, take the part allotted me in the work of this day ; which is to administer some spiritual advice, with respect to your conducting yourself in the ministerial character, and to animate you in the discharge of your pastoral office, in the midst of all those difficulties with which it must be, for the exercise of your faith and patience, surrounded.

I consider not myself as vested with any authority over your conscience ; but, as a brother, I come to be a helper of your faith. If I prove to be so on this happy occasion, I shall feel the most sensible pleasure ; a pleasure not only arising from the general love I bear to the brethren, but, from the peculiar christian connection we have been in, as members of the same community ; and more especially, as I appear here at your and the church's particular request.

You cannot expect, that, after so many charges as have been delivered and published, much to the purpose, by the eminent and learned, I should produce any thing particularly new; but, as we do not want any new truths, nor any novelty with respect to experience and practice, I shall attempt a plain, faithful, and affectionate address to your judgment and conscience; and, with a dependence on the Spirit for success, shall, for the sake of method, draw out the substance of this discourse, from the words recorded in

2 TIMOTHY ii. 15.

“ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a
 “ workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
 “ rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The apostle had a peculiar love for the young evangelist, and to express the strength of his affection, he introduces his first epistle to Timothy, “ My own son in the faith*.”

He acted as a spiritual father, and wrote to him as an inspired apostle, not exercising a lordly authority, or maintaining external pomp, to awe the inferior officers in the church. What adds a peculiar lustre to these epistles to Timothy, is, that, they not only breathe the pure language of the gospel, and wear the stamp of divine authority, but, that, they are written by one who loved the truths of the gospel, who “ laboured more abundantly †,” and enforced his exhortation to the evangelist by his own example. Well does the charge flow from the pen of one, who in the work of his Master never thought “ his life dear to himself ‡,” who “ gloried in tribulation §,” and triumphed in his bonds for Christ’s sake. “ Thou “ therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier

* 1 Tim. i. 2. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. ‡ Acts xx. 24. § Rom. v. 3.
 of

" of Jesus Christ*." Words that suit either the lips or the pen of such a veteran.

The preceding context is a chain of the most animating instructions; each exhortation containing a volume, and every verse, by those who understand what they read, must be accounted a heavenly treasure; from which I hope to gather some few helps, while, Sir, I address you in the improvement of the words I have read.

" Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a
" workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
" rightly dividing the word of truth."

You observe the exhortation is given with great emphasis, and all its parts claim your utmost regard.

" Study." The word, you know, signifies a diligent application to a business or a subject: thus our translators have justly rendered it, " Let
" us labour therefore to enter into that rest†." So in that solemn passage, " Wherefore, beloved,
" seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace,
" without spot, and blameless‡."

Diligence, labour, close application, are necessary to make up the character of a faithful minister. Success in any common service or business, is not to be expected without them. Those who are eminent in any of the learned professions, become and continue to be so by diligent application. The greater the work, the greater the labour, the more important the business, the greater diligence is necessary.

Your work, Sir, as it is the most honourable under heaven, so it is the most important; consequently indolence or inactivity must be dreaded.

* 1 Tim. ii. 3. † Heb. iv. 11. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

Your business is the most difficult of all engagements, and yet accompanied with the highest pleasures; consequently it requires the most accurate and constant attention. For this reason the apostle thus ushers in the exhortation of our text; which exhortation naturally divides itself into the two following parts:

- I. That, a minister is to "shew himself approved unto God."
- II. That, he is to shew himself "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

I. A minister is to "shew himself approved unto God."

Under this exhortation, Sir, it is necessary to observe, 1st, That a minister is to be studiously concerned to be "approved unto God;" and then, 2dly, He is "to shew himself" so before others. First, A minister is to be studiously concerned to be "approved unto God." You are, my dear brother, too well acquainted with the hope of the gospel, with the ground of your acceptance before the Holy Trinity (as your good confession has witnessed), for me to do any more than mention, that, this divine phrase, "approved unto God," conveys no idea of the possibility of Christ's servants being accepted with God for the sake of their own obedience. The idea is quite plain and natural; the word intimates his being approved with respect to his office and his work as a minister, as a servant on trial is approved by his master. The word is applied to a trial of a person or thing: thus, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life†." This trial is not, you well know,

† James i. 12.

by way of information to the Deity, or a condition of mercy, but an evidence and proof of discipleship, of the work of God in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Thus the apostle uses this word, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves*." — The expression then evidently shews us that the servant of Christ, as a servant, is to be concerned to act in all respects, so that he may have the approbation of his great and adorable Master: as every servant is accountable to his master among men, so is he that ministers in holy things accountable to God his master. The apostle, speaking of the overseers of the church, says, "for they watch for your souls," (not for your substance) "as they that must give an account†."

This, Sir, is a very serious matter, which I doubt not lay with great weight upon your mind, while you were pursuing your preparatory studies for the work of the ministry; and I am sensible it must have deeply impressed your heart, when you undertook the oversight of this people, and engaged to watch for the souls of men. May the impression ever abide on your thoughts and mine! We are serving the best of masters; a kind redeemer, but a just judge, who will soon by death call us to give up our accounts. Oh! how transporting the consideration of being so happy, as to receive, at the final day, his divine approbation, "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord‡."

Every good servant among men is desirous of pleasing his master; it is his interest, his comfort, his honour to do so; surely, then, the true servant of God will be earnestly concerned to please him. I will just "stir up your mind by way of re-

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Heb. xiii. 17. ‡ Matt. xxv. 21.
membrance,"

membrance *," while I observe that the reality of such a concern, will consist of two things :

A very close study of your Master's will. And,
Much secret prayer for grace, and constant help,
that you may be able to do it.

1st, A very close study of your Master's will.

And, when I say this, it is taken for granted, that, you love your work; that, it is not a hard service you are engaged in; that, you are not put into the ministry for "a piece of bread †;" that, you are no hireling, who, for the bare maintenance of yourself, will perform a certain number of outward services, grinding in the mill of hard duty, reading the scriptures, praying and preaching, because it is a trade you have been brought up to; as many are who wish their friends had made them any thing but ministers, but, being unfit for any other employ, they must drag on through this servile life.

You entered the ministry, Sir, I believe, because, you loved your Redeemer, and wished the prosperity of his kingdom. To be approved of him therefore in your office, you do well to study his revealed pleasure. It is impossible for a servant to act rightly, who is not acquainted with the mind of his lord. Moses and the prophets, in their services, waited to know the mind and will of God, "Thou shalt speak all that I command thee ‡." Moses the divine servant was neither to act nor speak in the discharge of his office, without the direction of his Master. Thus you find the apostle Peter says, "The prophecy came not
" in old time by the will of man : but holy men
" of God spake as they were moved by the Holy
" Ghost §." Now the canon of scripture is com-

* 2 Pet. iii. 1. † 1 Sam. ii. 36. ‡ Exod. vii. 2. § 2 Ep. i. 21.

pleat, we are not to expect any new revelation of the divine will for our acting or speaking in the church, or before the world: yet, we are diligently to “search the scriptures*,” the written will of heaven. I enforce, my dear brother, this advice, because the apostle, in his charge to Timothy, affirms, that, “All scripture is given by
“ inspiration of God, and is profitable for doc-
“ trine, for reproof, for correction, for instruc-
“ tion in righteousness; that the man of God
“ may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all
“ good works†.” By all means, Sir, continue to make those languages in which the scriptures were written, your most diligent study, whereby you gain the happy advantages of enjoying the truest knowledge of what you believe, preach, and practise.

2dly. Much secret prayer for grace, and constant help, that you may be able to do his will.

The word and prayer are connected. To “do your Lord’s will” is the greatest matter, next to knowing it. For a servant not to inquire after his master’s pleasure, shews that he is not wise; but, if he knows his will, and neglects to do it, he shews himself to be wicked: such an one is not approved of God, with all his external qualifications. The words of our Saviour, shew how awful the case of such a person is, “And that ser-
“ vant who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared
“ not himself, neither did according to his will,
“ shall be beaten with many stripes‡.”

Prayer is interwoven with the Christian’s life; it is eminently so with the prosperity of Christ’s ministers, I mean, with respect both to their inward comfort, and outward success.

My brother, meditation needs the watering of

* John v. 39. † 2 Epist. iii. 16, 17. ‡ Luke xii. 47.

prayer; and the armies of temptation you are to cut your way through, require a continual address at "the throne of grace*."

To "do the will of God" in public and private, needs more than the wisdom or boasted resolution of a moral philosopher; it requires continual communications of supply from him who is both "our righteousness and strength†." Your study, without prayer, will be barrenness; your pulpit attempts, without earnest expostulations with God, will be mere presumption; and your visits, in the neglect of this duty, must prove unprofitable both to yourself and your flock. True ministerial success is connected with a humble walk before God. The most eminent old-testament servants, were remarkable for their applications at a throne of mercy: You are too well furnished with these examples, for me to take up your time in particularizing them. Your "sufficiency is of God‡;" it is to him you must constantly apply for all furniture. Your Master in this is your example, witness the nights he spent in prayer; observe his fervency of affection, and his unwearied constancy. His apostles therefore were concerned to be unburthened of every secular business respecting the church, that, they might have time for the fulfilment of their ministry. "Wherefore brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word§." My dear Sir, the corruptions of your own heart, the resistance of unbelief, the various temptations you will have to be unfaithful to the consciences of your hearers, the many different cases of conscience among your people, the depths of know-

* Heb. iv. 16. † Isa. xlv. 24. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 5. Acts vi. 3, 4.
ledge

ledge at present undiscovered to your mind in the books of revelation, all concur to inforce the duty of prayer for strength that you may do the will of your Master. I would only add, your adorable Saviour is exalted on his throne to bestow every ministerial gift you can need in the faithful discharge of your office; for, he was anointed "with-
" out measure *," he "received gifts in the man †" to bestow them, and he is "Head over all things to the church ‡."

Secondly, A minister is "to shew himself" approved unto God before others.

Your greatest emulation is to be God's approved servant, and then to evidence this before men. Nature prompts us to wish for popularity, and its applause suits our vanity. To be praised for our public performances, to be esteemed for depth of judgment, to be considered as persons of genius and learning, and to be admired for the propriety of language, the force of argument, and the power of address, are things very hard to resist; thus we are tempted to shew ourselves, instead of holding forth Christ in the simplicity of the gospel. But, the apostle, in his epistle to the Corinthians, declares the noble end of preaching and acting in the ministerial character, when he says, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ
" Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants
" for Jesus sake §."

The caprice, pride, and vanity of the generality of hearers are so great, as necessarily to make popularity uncertain, and the approbation of men a thing not to be depended on; besides, the popularity, the blaze of an hour, and the short-lived esteem of a few admirers, may just please the proud imagination that loves to be flattered,

* John iii. 34. † Psalm lxxviii. 18. see margin. ‡ Eph. i. 22. § 2 Epist. iv. 5.

yet they never can satisfy the mind in solemn reflection; yea, all this may be, when a minister does not shew himself to be approved of God.

The word "shew" is used to signify to give evident proof, as in that declaration of the apostle Paul, "Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me*." For exciting your attention and my own to this charge to Timothy, I will take the liberty of mentioning, in a few particulars, how you, Sir, as a new-testament bishop, are to give evidence before the people that you are "approved unto God."

1st. By your being "sound in the faith†."

To be "sound in the faith" is essential to the approved character of a minister of Jesus. By being so, is to be understood, believing those truths, which are, in their inseparable connection, expressed in scripture as matters of the last importance. The Bible gives us a perfect system of truth; and the knowledge of one, leads to the understanding of the other. It is the glory of our renewed nature to believe what God has revealed of himself; and "without faith it is impossible to please God‡:" therefore, my brother, it certainly must be necessary that a minister should "shew himself" to be approved of God, by his being "sound in the faith." In the preceding chapter we read of "that form," or delineation, or pattern "of sound words," that Timothy received from Paul §. And thus the apostle writes to his son Titus, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine||."

I have no occasion to enlarge here, you having witnessed a good confession before many, and in this respect shewed yourself, in our opinion, to be approved of God according to his word.

* Acts xxiv. 13. † Tit. i. 13. ‡ Heb. xi. 6. § Ver. 13. || Titus ii. 1.

2dly, By your being steadily, diligently, faithful to the truth, and every part of that service your Master calls you to.

In these particulars, I humbly apprehend, we are to be peculiarly serious. Steadiness in Christ's ministers is a matter of the utmost consequence. The wavering of some, who are frequently changing their opinions, being fond of novelty, occasions the weak Christian, and the young convert to stagger; it occasions the established believer to mourn; and confirms our modern sceptics in infidelity. When the professed servants of Christ sometimes preach one, and at other times another doctrine, the people are bewildered, and know not what to believe, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" When ministers metamorphose themselves, so that they become what the company they are with would have them to be, especially to oblige those on whom they are basely dependent, they cause the profane to despise the things of God, and make the Deists glory in their favourite charge against us, namely, that the whole of religion is priestcraft; and so with Judas they betray their master. The truth, dear Sir, is to be bought, but never to be sold again. Zeal is the ornament of a faithful servant; put on "zeal as a cloke *," and let truth and faithfulness be your girdle. By zeal, I mean, not the fury of a passionate bigot, but the pure fire which the love of the truth kindles in the renewed heart; a zeal according to knowledge, that is divested of every thing that bears a tendency towards persecution: I mean, that zeal Christ and his apostles, under the holy unction of the Spirit, discovered. "Hold fast the

† 1 Cor, xiv, 8.

* If. lix. 17.

“ form of sound words which thou hast heard
 “ of me in faith, and love which is in Christ
 “ Jesus †.” Faithfulness and zeal are to be discovered in every part of your sacred employ : they are to be maintained in the pulpit amidst all opposition ; in the discipline of the church over which the great bishop of souls has made you overseer ; yea, what is more trying, you are to be zealously faithful in your private addresses. The servant of Christ, who is upon a business that respects eternal life, must be faithful according to his sentiments, or he is worse than a common murderer. It has been, Sir, often known, that a minister has been strangely entangled by reason of different sentiments in the congregation ; but you are not to consider whom you are to please, nor are you to be solicitous about whom you shall offend. If the truth offends, your Master will not be offended at you for declaring it, nor you, Sir, become any real loser, though it was to cost you more than your substance, even your life. It has been known that some external supporters of an interest have withdrawn their temporal aid, because the minister has been too plain in preaching the gospel, and opposing their pride, or perhaps, as Paul did Felix, made them tremble.

This may terrify him who expects his reward from man ; but the faithful servant of Christ, who expects his recompence from God in a way of grace, rejoices that he has not parted with the truth, and turned his back upon Christ, for the sake of a golden idol. Sir, if this was to be the case (which in this congregation I presume it is not) it would be your duty to “ know no man *,” but to speak the truth. You had better part with a rich sinner, than take a religious

† 2 Tim. i. 13. * 2 Cor. v. 16.

bribe, conceal the truth, starve the poor, and wound, if not lose, your own soul. That great but wicked prophet was obliged to say under the impulse of an awakened conscience, "If Balak
 "would give me his house full of silver and gold,
 "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my
 "God to do less or more†." But I refer you to the words of Peter and John before the rulers of the Jews, "Whether it be right, in the sight
 "of God, to hearken unto you more than unto
 "God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the
 "things which we have seen and heard*." Your zeal and faithfulness will, through the unction of the spirit, carry you above every reproach and stigma of the professing world: the prophane world being too busy in pursuit of their lusts, to give you any trouble, as the sword of persecution is safe in the scabbard.

Your zeal and faithfulness should also appear in the discipline of the church. Partiality is to be dreaded in the execution of your office; you are to stand up for the honour of your sovereign in his spiritual kingdom, and not connive at sin because it is in a man of eminence and wealth, consequently a man of power. Why is the poor man to be dealt with sooner than the rich? Christ's interest is not carnal; "he has chosen the
 "poor of this world, rich in faith‡." In order to your shewing yourself then an approved minister, great uprightness and impartiality must shine in your conduct before the church. Remember the zeal of Phinehas §, and forget not that Paul, for the sake of truth, even "withstood Peter to the face ||." Honour Christ in his church, and he will take care of you and his own interest.

† Numb. xxii. 18. * Acts iv. 19, 20. ‡ Jam. ii. 5.
 § Numb. xxv. 7, &c. || Gal. ii. 11.

Again, Sir, your zeal and faithfulness, with much wisdom and prudence, are to appear in your private visits. Many persons sit under faithful preaching, and are covered with their own self-opinion and pride, like Job's leviathan, of which it is said, "his scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal†:" they will apply the most searching parts of a discourse to others, and never think of themselves. Your business then is to chuse the seasonable time, and proper expressions for privately letting your brother know his fault, and faithfully with Nathan say, "Thou art the man*." Friendship at best hangs by a tie slenderer than the thread in a spider's web. It is, I own, my brother, a venture indeed to be faithful in private; but, Sir, remember, your master's approbation is infinitely dearer than the smile of your best earthly friend, at the expence of truth.

As you should never bring family and personal affairs into the pulpit, so endeavour to mix tenderness with your zeal, and persuade those you address, that your reproofs arise from pure love, and that was you not so to act, you must be unkind to them, and unfaithful to your Master. Let not your reproofs be given in a whirlwind; let not your words of rebuke rush down like a hail-storm, or burst forth like a tempest with thunder; but descend like distilling drops of dew, and "as the small rain upon the tender herb ‡."

I will add under this head, that, with zeal and faithfulness, diligence is connected. The most faithful servant of Jesus thinks, at the close of life, that he has done but little for his Master. While, Sir, you do not waste your constitution by any unnecessary excursions in your delivery,

† Job xli. 15. * 2 Sam. xii. 7. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 2.

avoid the stiffness of the dull declaimer, and speak not to immortal souls as if you was reading a lecture in the schools of the stoics. Be rather afraid of preaching too little, than too much; be rather afraid of a formality and flatness in your public work, than of being too lively and pathetic. Remember "the time is short †." It is good to be weary in your Master's service, though awful to be tired of it; "work while it is called to-day *," and you'll have an eternity to rest in. Christ is not a hard master; you are not called to any thing but what he will give you strength to go through, according to your constitution and abilities: "in season and out of season ‡" you are to be serving the Redeemer's interest; yea, even your relaxations are to be consistent with and subservient to the service you are to be engaged in.

A good servant considers himself as accountable to his master for his time; and therefore diligence is a branch of faithfulness in Christ's service. To inforce this head of zeal and faithfulness, joined with diligence, read often those words in our context, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us ||." To which I would add the sacred charge in the two first verses of the fourth chapter of the epistle: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season

† 1 Cor. vii. 29.

* Heb. iii. 13.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

|| Ver. 10, 11, 12.

“and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort,
“with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

3dly, You are to shew yourself approved of God in his service, by the order of your family, and the uprightness of your walk before the world.

It is true, my dear brother, at present you are in single life, but remember from a variety of reasons that naturally suggest themselves to your mind, it is expedient, and highly so, that a bishop should be a husband; and if Providence gives him a family, that he should fill up his character among them suitable to his office in the church of Christ.—A neglect of social duty is a dishonour cast upon our profession; and the apostle speaks very strongly upon this point, when he says, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife †.” “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity. For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God * ?”——

My only public advice upon this head is, that, for the honour of your profession, the good of your soul, the comfort of your charge, you marry “in the Lord †.” Seek happiness before riches, goodness before greatness. The peace of a community is often connected with peace and piety at home; order in a minister’s house encourages him to speak more plain and to the purpose on relative duties before the church of God.

The minister, who would shew himself to be God’s approved servant, should study outwardly to obey him in all things, especially in the sobriety and uprightness of his walk before the world. Strict honour, and acts of integrity, are the or-

† 1 Tim. iii. 2. * Ver. 4. 5. † 1 Cor. viii. 39.
naments

naments of all persons who regard the obligations of civil society: beyond doubt then, Sir, a bishop, or public minister in the church, who should live the truths he preaches, is bound by the most sacred ties to be strictly sober, avoiding every thing that should occasion the mouths of the prophane to blaspheme. The wicked lives and awful slips in the conduct of those who set up to be teachers of others, have been melancholy arguments put into the lips of our adversaries, which they unhappily make use of against real religion. How many eyes are upon us, some waiting for our fall, while others, with raised ideas of our distinguished character, expect too much from us. Therefore, to confirm my advice, I add what the apostle says, "A bishop must be blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour;" "not given to wine, no striker." Though it is necessary a minister should be comfortably supported by his people, he is "not to be greedy of filthy lucre †." The less connexions with the world, the better for the work of the ministry; "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the cares of this life, that he may please him that has chosen him to be a soldier *."

4thly, You are to "shew yourself approved unto God," by your bearing the spiritual burdens of your flock, exercising forbearance towards them in their infirmities, and with all humility and love engaging their hearts by becoming a specimen of the excellency of the gospel you proclaim.

To the honour of your profession you should in these respects practically preach over your discourses again. The further we go in our meditations upon this subject, the greater the work of a minister appears. If you are like your Master, you must feel the distresses of your people. Sym-

† 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3.

* 2 Tim. ii. 4.

pathy is a happy qualification for spiritual usefulness. Jesus is a compassionate as well as "faithful high-priest †." A tender-hearted minister has much to carry while he knows the various distresses of his flock, and by his own feelings he is induced to remember them in secret, and suit their cases in public.

Patience and forbearance, Sir, must be exercised according to the increase of your usefulness; and the different tempers you meet with will often put you in mind of your Master, "who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself *." Some, forgetting their place, and your office, may, for want of knowing more of themselves and the world, indecently and unguardedly speak to and of you, and by some awkwardness of conduct, resembling fractious children, with their peevish tempers, they may weary your spirits; but you, Sir, as an approved servant of Christ, must gently win them, while you do not meanly degrade yourself to encourage a disposition that by your meekness and resolution should be suppressed.—"Magnify your office ‡," but not yourself. Let not the ingratitude of those you serve prevent your going on to do good.

Give the poor their share in your visits, and let the sick and tempted experience your peculiar notice, while the sorrowful widow and fatherless children challenge the compassion of your heart, and claim your prayers and advice. Your visits should be, like our Lord's, all instructive. Leave the favour of your converse upon your company when you retire from them; mix cheerfulness with gravity; recommend religion where-ever you go; and by your serious and pleasant deportment, make every family long for a repetition of those

† Heb. ii. 17. * Heb. xii. 3. ‡ Rom. xi. 13.

favours.—“ I let no man despise thy youth; but
 “ be thou an example of the believers, in word,
 “ in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith,
 “ in purity †.”

I just, Sir, touch upon the second part of our text.

II. That of “ shewing yourself a workman
 “ that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly
 “ dividing the word of truth.”

Those lectures you received in the academy, from your divinity tutor, upon the work of preaching, so well adapted to lead your thoughts forward on this subject, render it less necessary for me to be large upon it.—I shall just desire you, therefore, to observe, the two striking ideas with which the apostle animates his son Timothy. 1st, That of “ a workman.” 2dly, That of “ a person whose business it is to serve a family, and give out to them their proper portions.”

1st, That of a “ workman.”

The phrase is common and very expressive. When we represent a person as a master of his business, we say “ he is a workman ;” ’tis giving him a full character; declaring, that he is no pretender to his business, like one who awkwardly sets about what he does not understand, and makes such blunders as shows he is unfit for the undertaking.

The apostle, sensible of the importance of the ministry, thus writes to Timothy, whom he knew to be well acquainted with the scripture, but, because his business was so important, he would have him emphatically to be “ a workman.” It is not for me to say who are, or who are not Christ’s servants; or to assert how far qualified an instrument must be for the master’s use. A builder has

† 1 Tim. iv. 12.

a vast variety of instruments; so the grear builder, God, beyond doubt, has a great variety in carrying on the building of his church; and he over-rules the various abilities and capacities of men to subserve his divine purpose: but, the apostle was desirous, that Timothy might be a proficient, a master of his business, so that he had no need to be ashamed let him be called to any part of the work. This, Sir, should be your and my sacred ambition. Not that the workman will be satisfied with himself that he is eminent; no, he who is best acquainted with this spiritual business, is the most humble and self-diffident, and will be always studying to know more of the gospel, and how to defend it, that its enemies may not confound him, and that he may not be put to the blush before the professors of Christ's name.

"A workman that needs not to be ashamed" then, is he who can speak what he feels and understands; being nourished with that with which he feeds others, he will stand the laugh of fools, the frowns of tyrants, and bear the flames of martyrdom. He is a workman who is master of his subject, "apt to teach †;" who, upon every occasion that Providence points out, is ready to engage in the work of the Lord, and with such plainness that the illiterate may understand, while the most learned can have no room to cast contempt; one who knows how to handle his subject without making one part clash with or contradict the other.

You, my dear brother, are placed where learning has fixed one of her capital seats; therefore you will be concerned to shew, with good sense and propriety of language, that though the doctrines of the cross were "foolishness to the Greeks*,"

† 2 Tim. ii. 24.

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

they are not inconsistent with true reason, reason sanctified; and by plain argument from scripture shew, that "it hath" always "pleased God," by what the false wisdom of the world calls "foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.†"—While you study authors of various kinds, make the scripture your magazine, for there you will find your panoply.—Be concerned, that your public performances favour of your private devotions, while they appear to be the fruit of much meditation and close study. Take care, Sir, that your criticisms, though clear and beautiful, are not mere dry criticisms, without shewing their happy experimental use; otherwise, to your common auditors, they will be (to borrow a thought) "like
 " the brightness of a star in a frosty night, which,
 " however brilliant, communicates no heat to
 " the beholder, but leaves him to freeze." To conclude.

2dly, The other idea is that of a "person whose business is to serve a family, and give them their proper portions."

The apostle, knowing what havock of truth was made by novices, by vain disputants, exhorts Timothy, in the words preceding my text, to "put them," that is, the churches and ministers, "in remembrance, charging them before the
 " Lord, that they strive not about words of no
 " profit, but to the subverting of the hearers *;" upon which he orders Timothy to "study to shew himself a workman," by way of example, that had no occasion to be ashamed of such conduct, but, according to the idea of the expression, would, as a steward or as the master of a large family, "divide the word of truth aright," carve out the sacred provision in its proportion and connexion.

† Ver. 21.

* Ver. 15.

This

This sacred advice, with which our text closes, respects, Sir, our peculiar concern to conduct ourselves faithfully, wisely, carefully, in the administration of the word.—Some suppose, and with no impropriety, that the metaphor is taken from the skill the Priests and Levites discovered in cutting up the sacrifices, and distributing the parts rightly, some for the altar of Jehovah, and the other parts to the people, in which business they were to be exact.

Allow me, Sir, to observe the following things as necessary to be attended to, in order to our “rightly dividing the word of truth;” “the word of truth” is too sacred to be trifled with.

1st, Let the real plain sense and meaning of the word be studied and then opened; for by applying scripture wrong, according to sound or fancy, the children lose their portion, and the word of God is mangled, not carved.

2dly, Sacred truths should be kept distinct, but maintained in their connexion: for want of this, the gospel has suffered by the hands of those who have not known how to divide it aright. Thus justification and sanctification have been confounded together, the righteousness of Christ, with the inward work of the Spirit, to the dishonour of scripture, and the confusion of the hearer.

3dly, No point, however important in its nature, must be introduced that is foreign to the particular subject we are upon, for by so doing we puzzle and not edify.

4thly, Vain metaphysical distinctions are to be studiously avoided; in as much as they distract or divert the mind, instead of leading it to the simplicity of the gospel.

5thly,

5thly, It is necessary that we place every doctrine, institution, and precept, in their order, before the people, according to their importance, proving and urging them with judgment and affection.

6thly, My dear brother, in public and private, "divide the word of truth" agreeable to the capacities and understandings of your hearers. Let not the learned and the judicious be without substantial thoughts to feast their minds; "strong men" are to be fed with "strong meat†." But remember you have some who must be supposed to be very ignorant; some whose constant laborious services in life will not permit them to have an opportunity for reading and conversation; some whose capacities are weak; yea, many, who by age are not capable of receiving any thing but what is easy and plain. And, my dear Sir, the offspring of your flock are a special part of your charge, for whom you are to be accountable to your Master. "Feed my lambs," says Jesus to every minister*; give the babes "the sincere milk of the word‡."

7thly, "Divide the word of truth aright," by giving a portion to the sick, the distressed, the tempted. Some need the word for quickning under spiritual decays. You will have to do with those who are distressed with various difficulties starting up in their minds, as to some peculiar truths; others who are overwhelmed with a view of themselves, the darkness of Providence in many inward and outward afflictions; many ready to faint with evil surmises; and not a few walking in bondage through fear of death.—All these cases, Sir, require wisdom and knowledge to suit in your discourses and private conversations; for which reason I will venture to say, "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flock§."

† Heb. v. 12, 13, 14. * John xxi. 15. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 2.
§ Prov. xxvii. 23.

Wishing

Wishing, that you, Sir, may have the intrepid courage of a divine soldier; all the skill and tenderness of a faithful shepherd; all the success of a husbandman in God's vineyard; soul prosperity, with a confirmed state of natural health; much peace and happiness with this sacred family; that you may be a blessed instrument for enlarging and edifying the church; that the truths you have confessed may be your support through all the stages of your life, your strong and reviving cordials on your death-bed; and that you may at last fall asleep in the arms of him you have faithfully preached: I conclude my address with the words of the apostle Peter, "Feed the flock of God, as much as in you is, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being a lord over God's heritage, but being an example to the flock: and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away †." Amen.

† 1 Pet. v. 2, 3, 5. See the margin.

T H E

T H E S E R M O N

By JOHN CONDER, D. D.

GREAT and remarkable is the promise which God made to Zion's converts : " I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion ; and I will give you pastors according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding † : " a promise which hath a special reference to gospel times and gospel provisions, for our spiritual good. The gospel is a blessing, and a gospel ministry a mercy and gift of God, which can never be sufficiently prized and improved by us.—I hope I may say, " This day " is this scripture fulfilled in your ears * . " Our reverend brother, who hath this day taken the oversight of this church, hath witnessed a good confession before many witnesses ; thereby shewing his knowledge of the ever-blessed gospel, and that he is not ashamed of the sacred and momentuous truths therein contained ; and I greatly hope, that, through the continual aids of grace, " his labours shall not be in vain in the Lord § , " but eminently blessed and owned, for the salvation of many souls.

† Jer. iii, 14, 15. * Luke iv. 21. § 1 Cor. xv, 58.

The service assigned me in this day's solemnity is, to address you my Christian friends of this gospel community, in relation to the present mercy ; as being now again provided with a pastor to go in and out before you, and to break the bread of life unto you. And, as the ground of my discourse, I shall direct your thoughts to that important and affectionate address of the apostle to the believing Hebrews.

HEBREWS XIII. 22.

“ I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of
“ exhortation.”

This epistle to the Hebrews is, indeed, one of the largest that was given under divine inspiration, but, in the last clause of this verse, it is said to be “ written in few words,” *i. e.* considering the variety and importance of the subjects treated of in it ; so many things, so great and interesting to the souls of men, and these so clearly and yet so compendiously discussed, (within the compass of a single epistle) as serve strongly to evidence the divine and infallible Spirit, by which it was indited. The apostle, in the words read, is drawing to the close of his whole design ; wherein he beautifully recapitulates the subject, and withal renews his affectionate request to them, that they would take good heed to the things which he had written. “ I beseech you, “ brethren, &c. *i. e.* (in the language of a late judicious paraphrast†)—“ And now to draw “ to a close, My dear brethren, whom I love, “ not only as my kindred according to the flesh, “ but, especially as fellow Christians, I earnestly

† Guyse in loc.

“ beg

“ beg of you, that, laying aside all prejudices,
 “ ye would take in good part, and readily receive
 “ and comply with the word of exhortation, in-
 “ cluding all the instructions and cautions which
 “ I have given you in this epistle; and that you
 “ will not think it too long or tedious: for,
 “ though it be larger than some others of my
 “ writing, I have summed up the doctrines re-
 “ lating to the Mosaic law, and to the person,
 “ offices, and gospel of Christ, in as short a com-
 “ pass as I could, consistent with the vast im-
 “ portance of the things themselves, and your
 “ concernment in them, and with my great af-
 “ fection for you; as also in comparison with
 “ the much greater enlargement I could have
 “ gone into, had it seemed needful for you.”

I would therefore adopt the language and spirit of our apostle in the text, while, I attempt to employ the present minutes, for your instruction in reference to this day's solemnity.

And in doing this, I would,

I. Make a few remarks upon the “manner” of the apostle's address.

II. Point out the principal “matters” of exhortation to which he refers. And,

III. Imitate this great pattern, by giving you a few words of exhortation, suited to the present occasion.

I. I propose briefly to remark upon the “manner” in which the great apostle addresses these believing Hebrews. And here the following things are worth our notice.

R. 1. In dealing with the consciences of men, and dispensing the word of life unto them, the spirit, which should breath through all our ministrations, is a spirit of love, friendship, and condescension. Here is the great apostle of the

E

gen-

gentiles, speaking by the infallible dictates of the Divine Spirit, instructing these Hebrews in the great things of God's grace, and their own duty and interest: every word therefore was clothed with a divine commission and authority; yet, you meet with nothing that is imperious, dictatorial, or lordly, "I beseech you, &c." Instead of authoritative injunctions, he deals in kind and affectionate persuasions; he uses the kindest intreaties, where he might have enjoined with the most high and absolute authority: and herein he stands as a blessed example to all dispensers of the same gospel, that we may carefully walk in his steps.

R. 2. People often want most persuading to attend to those things which are most beneficial, and for their greatest good. Thus it is particularly in hearing the word. It is of very great importance, that we attend to the "word of faith†," i. e. the great and blessed truths relating to the way of salvation, so as to gain just and adequate ideas of them, as gospel doctrines; but, it is of much greater importance to attend to the application of this grace to our own souls, and the actual exemplification of things there. And this is the tendency of the word of "exhortation;" which you see the apostle singles out, and in a special manner presseth their religious regards to and remembrance of.

R. 3. There is a criminal reluctance and backwardness in mens minds, to the receiving and relishing "the word of exhortation." This is a sad instance of man's natural depravity, which is not unfrequently heightened, and that greatly, by weaknesses and prejudices, otherways contracted. The apostle was well aware of the depraved workings of the human heart, and how strongly our

† Rom. x. 8.

minds are prone to be prejudiced, and set against the means of our greatest benefit; wherefore he intreats them to "suffer the word of exhortation;" he makes it his special petition, that they would receive it in good part, permit it to have an entrance and due weight with them, give, what he had said of this kind, proper entertainment, and not shut the door of their hearts against it, or pass it over, in a slight and trifling way. And it, indeed, greatly argues the special dominion of grace, and a spiritual subjection to the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, when our hearts are brought to relish and embrace "the word of exhortation," with Christian readiness, reverence, and love. Much of the contrary is to be seen among professors in every age: for how many are there, that profess a liking and a zeal for the doctrines of free grace, and salvation by Christ, who will by no means bear with those parts of our ministrations, which relate to the spirit and the work of the gospel! While ministers dwell upon the fulness, freeness, and riches of gospel grace, and hold forth, doctrinally, the great and exalted benefits of Christ's redemption, together with the power and faithfulness of that great Undertaker of our salvation, men of this cast are all ear, and all commendation and applause: but, when, with the apostle, they come to deliver "the word of exhortation," i. e. to set before them the necessity of gospel holiness, and gospel obedience, of a conscientious and diligent use and improvement of the ordinances and means of grace, and of the Christian's keeping a strict watch over his spirit and temper, his walk and deportment, so as to please God; pressing and urging these things, as parts of the authoritative will of Heaven, the necessary fruits and evidences of the truth of their

faith, and hope; and personal interest in the blessings revealed; presently they sink quite low in such professors esteem; the character of dark, and dry, and legal preachers, is soon the character fixed upon the most zealous and affectionate lovers of their hearers souls; and it is well, if, with our utmost intreaties, we can gain a cool and patient hearing from such persons. In direct contrast to such a spirit, the real Christian is humbly desirous of knowing what the pure and "perfect will of " God†" is, and of having his heart and actions conscientiously conformed to the precepts, as well as animated and comforted by the promises of the word. To cultivate this sacred temper in the hearts of these Hebrews, the apostle writes, "I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation."

And, from the example in the text, we also learn, R. 4. That true and faithful dispensers of the word, (those whose hearts are warm, as the apostle's was, for the salvation of immortal souls) must needs persevere in declaring "all the counsel of God*" and in discharging the whole of their commission received; i. e. they are not only to preach the truths of God in a doctrinal, speculative way, but, to bring matters home, to the hearts and consciences of men; to deal much, not only in the word of faith, but of "exhortation" also; and, in love and compassion to the souls of men, to intreat and beseech them to receive and give good heed unto it, as matter of their special duty and interest, if they ever propose any personal and saving good by a preached gospel. But passing these points, as less suited to my present province, I proceed to the next general, which is,

† Rom. xii. 2.

* Acts xx. 27.

II. To point out the principal “matters” of exhortation to which the text refers. And what are these? If ye cast your eyes upon your Bibles, ye will find many weighty and excellent duties, to which we are exhorted in this chapter, such as, “Let brotherly love continue”—“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers”—“Remember them that are in bonds”—“Let your conversation be without covetousness†,” &c. But, in the judgment of the best expositors, our apostle, in this exhortation, is carrying their thoughts back, not merely upon the things mentioned in the immediate context, but, to all the particulars of counsel and advice, which he had given through the several parts of this epistle. And it may not be unseasonable, or without its use, to observe, that, this excellent epistle consists of several distinct sermons, or regular, set discourses; wherein the inspired penman not only states and proves the doctrinal points of which he treats, but subjoins a close and pertinent application and improvement of each as he goes along. Thus let it be observed.

1, The epistle opens with the blessed and glorious doctrine of the person and mission of the Son of God; the infinite dignity of his person, and the unparalleled greatness of his mission and work. “God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto our fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds, who being the brightness of his glory*,” &c. The improvement of these wonderful discoveries is made chap. ii. 1—5.

† Verse 1, &c.

* Chap. i. 1, 2, 3.

2. The apostle's second discourse treats of the incarnation of Christ, and the necessity there was for it, from ver. 5. to the end of the second chapter; of which he makes the proper use in chap. iii. and the beginning of the ivth.

3. His third discourse holds forth that blessed spiritual and everlasting rest, which the incarnate Saviour hath procured and ascertained, by his death and blood shed, to all believers. This begins at chap. iv. 2. which also is improved in a most encouraging and consoling manner from the 11th verse to the end.

4. He next proceeds to treat of the priestly office of Christ in particular, and the excellency of that sort or order of priesthood which he is of; not a priest after the order of Aaron, but after an higher and more perfect one, namely, "the order of Melchisedec:" so constituted by him that said, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec†." This point also he improves from ver. 11. to the end of chap. vi.

5. The seventh chapter reassumes the subject, respecting the higher order, and peculiar typical glories of Melchisedec's priesthood above that of Aaron; and this particularly, as to the greater dignity of his person, and the perpetuity of his character and office, of whom "it is witnessed that he liveth;" while Aaron and his sons could not "continue by reason of death*."—And this subject is beautifully used to the confirmation and service of our faith, from ver. 25. to the end. And,

6. In close connection with the former, we are insensibly led into the doctrine of the "two covenants," on which this distinction of the two orders of priesthood is founded; and which necessarily introduces a difference of dispensation:

† Ch. v. 6.

* Ver. 8, 23.

of which matters the apostle treats at large in the eighth, the ninth, and part of the tenth chapters; to which he subjoins the practical improvement, chap. x. from the nineteenth verse to the end.— And having mentioned faith, as the special means of our becoming personally interested in this great high-priest and surety of the better covenant,

7. The seventh and last discourse is employed upon the doctrine of faith: this he first defines†, and then beautifully illustrates, as to its special nature, acts, and effects, by a variety of instances and examples of Old Testament believers, who, though they lived under a less perfect dispensation of grace, yet were eminent and lively patterns for our imitation.—Then follows a most judicious and animated improvement of this point also, in the xiith chapter throughout: when, drawing towards the close of his whole design, we have the exhortation to many personal and relative duties, of a more miscellaneous nature, which is properly the general improvement of the whole; and at the end of all the rest, is the remarkable affectionate entreaty under our consideration, “I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation.”—Therefore,

What I have farther before me, under this head, is to single out a few instances of the principal things that had been proposed to their serious consideration, by way of ministerial exhortation and advice, and which our apostle is here so earnestly desirous they would be careful to retain in their minds and memories.

And here my main difficulty is to bring my subject into a proper compass; nor will our time allow of much more than the bare mentioning of the things intended.

† Chap. xi. 1.

1. When the apostle is thus earnestly beseeching these believing Hebrews and us, to "suffer the word of exhortation," he principally intends our "spiritual adherence and attachment to Christ, and a life of faith on him."

The great subject of this epistle, and indeed of the whole gospel, is the doctrine of the person, offices and work, of the incarnate Saviour. He is the great friend of sinners, and the only object of their humble confidence and hope toward God; the only and effectual medium of our access to God, and acceptance with him; our great and everliving high-priest, who, "by his one offering, hath perfected forever them that are sanctified†:" to him, therefore, all the called of God are taught "to flee for refuge as the hope set before them*." "There is salvation in no other‡;" but this is the "great salvation" which contains therein every thing which deserves the name of a refuge and a rest. Hence the apostle is very early in giving that solemn expostulation, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation‡?" And he gives it as his most sacred counsel, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high-priest of our profession, Christ Jesus||," i. e. consider him in his person, undertaking, and work; consider him in his grace, faithfulness, and power to save; consider him in his authority and right of claim to your most stedfast adherence, faithful attachment, entire dependence, and unfeigned spiritual obedience. Wherefore he further exhorts, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God§," &c. To depart

† Ch. x. 14.

* Chap. vi. 18.

‡ Acts iv. 12.

‡ Heb. ii. 3.

|| Chap. iii. 1.

§ Ver. 12.

from Christ, is to “depart from the living God;” ’tis to depart from Jesus, and turn the back upon that spiritual and everlasting rest, which he alone can lead us to the possession of.—Hence the exhortation, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it †.”—Yea, “let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall, after the same example of unbelief *.” Wherefore, “brethren, suffer the word of exhortation” on this interesting point.

2. This “word of exhortation” respects “the Christian’s real and sensible progress, in the life of grace and holiness.”

It is, my Christian Friends, an unspeakable mercy to be built upon the right foundation, and to know experimentally what it is to “have fled for refuge to the hope set before us;” but, there are other, and further cares, that lie before us, viz. that, we make good proficiency in the spiritual life. It concerns the pilgrim, not only to set out well, but to hold on, and make sensible progress in his journey.—The Christian’s life is a progressive life; he goes on “from strength to strength ‡.” To this our apostle refers, when he exhorts, “Wherefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection §:” “leaving them,” not as some do, by departing from them, and giving them up, as of no farther account in the Christian life; but, the meaning is, not resting in them, or contenting ourselves with present measures of attainment, as unsound hearts are apt to do, flattering themselves they know enough to carry

† Chap. iv. 1.

* Jer. 11.

‡ Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

§ Chap. vi. 1.

them to heaven, and they care for no more: but this is acting as if the building was finished, because the foundation is laid; whereas, there is the superstructure also, which must be diligently and carefully carried on, till the whole is compleated. And, “we desire,” says our sacred exhorter, “that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who thro’ faith and patience inherit the promises†;” or, as the apostle in another epistle——“Not as tho’ I had already attained, either were already perfect; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark*, &c.”--Now, this spiritual progress, of which we are speaking, includes the whole of the Christian’s life as such: it respects his knowledge, his faith, his holiness, and his uniform obedience, his utmost essayed uniformity of heart, lip, and life, to the preceptive will of Christ, his Lord and Redeemer. It is the believer’s bounden duty to aim continually at a greater proficiency in all.—And there is room for it! seeing at best “we know but in part, and prophesy but in part:‡” little we know, little we believe, and less we practice. “Suffer therefore the word of exhortation,” that, ye carefully endeavour, in the strength of grace, to “go on unto perfection§;” “that ye use all diligence to add to your faith—virtue, to virtue knowledge—temperance—patience--godliness--brotherly kindness—charity: for if these things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ||.” But, to proceed,

† Chap. vi. 11, 12. * Phil. iii. 12, 13. † 1 Cor. xiii. 9.
§ Heb. vi. 1. || 2 Pet. i. 5.

3. This "word of exhortation" respects also a "people's stedfast adherence to their gospel profession."——Having known the truth, the Lord our God requires our steady profession of it, and walk in it. It is a distinguishing mercy to enjoy the gospel in its purity and power; hence both our duty and interest call for a steady uniform zeal for it, maintenance of it, and a conscientious discharge of all the spiritual obligations which our privileges lay us under. Here, for instance,

(1.) It is a people's duty and interest to "guard their faith," to hold fast the form of sound words. "Hold fast the form of sound words (says the apostle) which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus †." The truths of the ever-blessed gospel ("that faith once delivered "to the saints"*) ought to be esteemed as a most precious jewel, which is not to be easily parted with, but highly prized, and carried in our very bosom, lest those that "handle the word deceitfully ‡" steal it from us, and, ere we are aware, rob us of so great a treasure. Hence the exhortation, "Be not carried about with divers and "strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that "the heart be established with grace §." The truths of God are establishing truths, and it is a good thing when a church and people are established in them, so as to maintain their adherence to them without wavering. Many professors (alas! too many in our day) are like "children, tossed to "and fro, and carried about with every wind of "doctrine, by the sleight of men, even the cunning craftiness of them that lie in wait to deceive ||." With such sort of professors the whole of religion seems to lie in altering their creed;

† 2 Tim. i. 13.

* Jude ver. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 2.

§ Heb. xiii. 9.

|| Eph. iv. 14.

in falling in love with every new opinion, and fanciful singularity they can pick up, however contrary to sound doctrine, and the faith they once received. But, how sad the symptom! when those that seemed to “begin in the spirit,” thus sadly “end in the flesh†,” “turning aside to another “gospel, which indeed is not another gospel *,” but a mischievous and dangerous perversion of the gospel of Christ. Thus to apostatize from the truth, and turn enemies and blasphemers of the gospel they once professed, is, according to our apostle, one of the most deplorable conditions men can well be in——“For it is impossible for “those who were once enlightened, and have “tasted of the heavenly gift, &c. if they shall fall “away, to renew them again unto repentance; “seeing they have crucified to themselves the Son “of God afresh, and put him to an open shame‡.” “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest “heed to the things which we have heard, lest “at any time we should let them slip §.”

(2.) This maintenance of our Christian profession respects “the constancy and regularity of our worship and walk, and a diligent attendance to the privileges and duties, of our church-relation.” A church of Christ is a number of believers, united according to the laws of Christ, agreeing to join in the public profession of the truth, and to walk together in all the statutes and ordinances, which he hath appointed. It is therefore a matter of no small importance, that every one of us move and act in our proper sphere; that, we “hold fast our profession ||;” that, we be regular and steady in our places, “not forsaking “the assembling ourselves together, as the man-

† Gal. iii. 3.
§ Chap. ii. 1.

* Chap. i. 6, 7.
|| Chap. iv. 14.

‡ Chap. vi. 4.

“ner of some is, but exhorting,” and stirring up
 “one another†,” to an active and due performance of every Christian service, whereby we may edify, not ourselves only, but one another also. Thus the apostle Jude exhorts : “These be they
 “who separate themselves, sensual, not having
 “the Spirit ; but ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the
 “Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of
 “God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus
 “Christ unto eternal life*.” And how beautifully doth our apostle improve the doctrine of Christ’s priesthood to this purpose ! “And having an
 “High priest over the house of God, let us
 “draw near with a true heart,” &c. “Let us
 “hold fast the profession of our faith, without
 “wavering, for he is faithful that has promised :
 “and let us consider one another, to provoke
 “unto love and good works ; not forsaking the
 “assembling of ourselves together, &c.†” —
 “I beseech you, brethren, to suffer the word of
 “exhortation” in this matter ; ‘tis of great importance to your well-being as a church and people.

Thus much for this third instance ; but once more,

4. When the apostle intreats, that, we would
 “suffer the word of exhortation,” he had his eye no less, “upon the whole of the Christian’s temper, and his external deportment, and walk in the world.” “The true grace of God||” is a sacred plant, which takes its root in the Christian’s heart, but brings forth its fruits in his life and conversation ; so that they who are really the children of God are “led by the Spirit of God§,” and they

† Chap. x. 25.

* Jude 20, 21.

‡ Chap. x. 21. &c.

|| 1 Pet. v. 12.

§ Rom. viii. 14.

who are so led, are men of another spirit and temper, men of another cast and conduct, to the rest of the world. Hence the exhortation of our Lord himself: "Let your light so shine before
 "men, that they may see your good works, and
 "glorify your Father which is in heaven.†"——

The religion of many lies within a very little compass. The embracing a set of religious opinions, and zealously attaching themselves to the party of the same spirit with themselves, is the whole of what multitudes know of religion. So ignorant are they of things divine, and yet so bigotted to usual modes and forms, that, they will not allow themselves a moment's close enquiry; whereas true religion, and undefiled, is a very different matter; 'tis "a spark of heavenly life in the soul of man," which exerts and discovers itself by the proper exercise of the several graces which form the Christian character, and by the diligent performance of the several duties of the Christian life, suited to our respective circumstances and conditions; duties both personal and relative, private and social: and this our blessed Lord terms "our bringing forth fruit," and "herein (says he) is my Father glorified, that ye
 "bring forth much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples". Now, all these particulars furnish out your minister with farther and distinct matter for "the word of exhortation," and in this way our apostle fills up the two last chapters of this great epistle. He exhorts, "that, having such a
 "cloud of witnesses" (as he had just before mentioned) "we would lay aside every weight, and
 "the sin which doth so easily beset us, and so
 "with patience run the race that is set before us,

† Matt. v. 16.

• John xv. 8.

“looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith†:” and having proposed Him, as the great pattern for Christian imitation, he proceeds to instance in various particulars; such as patience under burthens, submission in afflictions, courage in the face of oppositions; in holiness, purity, piety, circumspection, and godly fear, unto the end, remembring, that, “our God is a consuming fire*.”—And in this thirteenth chapter he descends to relative and social duties also, which are no less necessary and praise-worthy in their places; such as “love to the brethren; hospitality to strangers; sympathy with the oppressed; liberality to the necessitous; purity and chastity towards all, together with that jewel of contentment, “contentment with such things as we have, “seeing that God hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee: so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear “what man can do unto me‡.”

By this time we may gather, in some good measure, what the apostle had upon his heart, when he thus makes it his last request, in the language of most affectionate importunity, “and I beseech “you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation.”—This leads us to what was farther proposed, viz.

III. To imitate the apostle, by giving you, (my christian friends) a few words of exhortation, referring in a special manner to the work and business of this day. And,

1. “Suffer the word of exhortation,” when I say, “Bless God for this day’s merciful provision.” It is the prerogative of God alone to provide a people with “a pastor according to his “heart.” Every gospel minister is sent forth and

† Chap. xii. 1, 2.

* Ver. 29.

‡ Ver. 1, &c.

spirited

spirited of God; it is the Lord who giveth us both our commission and our gifts; it is He who in the course of his providence, "opens a door of utterance†" to us; it is He who inclines a people's hearts to chuse, and inclines a minister's heart to undertake "the oversight of them*" in the Lord; it is He also, who according to his infinite wisdom and grace, grants us all our acceptance, and our success. Receive your pastor and minister therefore as the special provision and gift of God for your spiritual edification and good.—To overlook the hand of the Lord herein, is to overlook and in a sort to despise the very fountain of all your mercies. Religion teaches us, to keep our grateful eye here, in the bestowment of every blessing both of providence and grace. Whatever the means, whoever the instruments, the Lord himself is the author of all our mercies.—Wherefore,

"Bless God from your hearts, that He hath graciously brought you again into a settled state." Recollect your anxious fears, that, the Lord would leave you destitute, and suffer you to be scattered and separated "as sheep without a shepherd‡." The inconveniences and disadvantages, nay, the unspeakable damage of such a situation, have been in part experienced, and may be easily conceived; not only discouragements of heart, but great and evident declensions, and decays of vital religion, are generally the sad consequences of such a dispensation; how should it be otherwise? when this is one of the most solemn tokens of God's displeasure: but, blessed be God, he has been better to you than all your fears, "preventing you with his goodness,§" and "putting a new song into your mouths||."

† Col. iv. 3.

• 1 Pet. v. 2

‡ Matth. ix. 36.

§ Psalm xxi. 3.

|| Psalm xl. 3.

“ Prize the mercy that He hath continued the
 “ real gospel among you.” A people may be
 provided with a minister in judgement, not in
 mercy. When they are left to make the unhappy
 choice of one after their own hearts, rather than
 after God’s heart, this is the case. To be fixed
 with a spiritual guide who is himself ignorant
 of, or else an enemy to the true gospel of Jesus
 Christ, or, who at best is unsettled and wavering
 about important points, is to be worse than un-
 provided, it is to be in continual hazard of being
 led out of the ways of peace, instead of being
 guided in them; the consequence here, is not
 only dangerous but may be fatal. Further,

Having the great thing secured, (as I trust)
 in your present settlement, viz. the ancient, ge-
 nuine, pure “ gospel of the grace of God †,”
 “ guard against laying an undue stress on lesser
 “ matters.” It is really a great weakness and
 folly in many hearers, that, however sound a
 minister may be in the faith, however substantial
 and truly spirited his discourses, yet if there be
 some little matters in the “ manner” of his dis-
 pensing the word, different from what they have
 been used to, they are almost as much discom-
 posed as if he came with another gospel. In-
 stances need not be given, the apostle’s exhorta-
 tion is good, to such persons; “ Brethren, be
 “ not children in understanding, howbeit in ma-
 “ lice be ye children, but in understanding be
 “ ye men *.” Nor is it a small instance of man-
 ly understanding, and that “ wisdom which is
 “ from above ‡,” carefully in all things to di-
 stinguish between matters substantial, and mat-
 ters merely circumstantial and indifferent; be-

† Acts xx. 24.

* 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

‡ James iii. 17.

tween the wholesome savoury precious food, that is set before you, and the exact manner in which it is served up, for your spiritual nourishment and use. Ministerial gifts and abilites greatly differ, but while the same blessed and everlasting gospel is preached with faithfulness and fervour, a people have great reason to rejoice in their privileges, and “the grace wherein they stand †.”—In a word, therefore carefully distinguish between the idle trifling spirit and humour of a critic and caviller, and the serious, humble, teachable spirit of the real christian, who comes to ordinances, with a sacred thirst after the word, that he may be instructed, edified, and comforted thereby. “Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another *.”

2. “Endeavour conscientiously to discharge your duties, which you owe to him that is now let over you in the Lord.” You owe your minister much love and esteem,—much reverence and respect,—beneficence and kindness. You owe him your company and stated attendance on his ministrations, together with your constant endeavours to make his relation, situation, and labours, lightsome, and pleasant, by all manner of means. To this end, let him know the benefit and service he is of, to your souls. And as many as “have tasted the Lord is gracious §,” “give up yourselves to the Lord ‡,” in church communion; this will greatly encourage his heart and strengthen his hands in his Master’s work. And in this, and every other case, “suffer the word of exhortation,” not only from him, who

† Rom. v. 2.

* Rom. xiv. 19.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 3.

‡ 2 Cor. viii. 5.

is now speaking, but from your pastor also in the course of his stated ministrations among you. Permit him to be faithful to your souls; receive every part of the truth in the love of it, not only in doctrinal matters, but when he is “reproving, rebuking, and exhorting, with all long-suffering also†,” according to the many prescriptions and examples in the word. Not that I would be understood to mean, it is the duty of a people to pin their faith on their minister’s sleeve (as the common phrase is) i. e. to take every thing as gospel, which their preacher may utter; but, it is their duty, to give good heed to the things that are spoken, to weigh them well in the balance of the sanctuary, and upon the conviction of their own judgments and consciences, that, the things delivered, are according to scripture, (sound bible divinity) they are not at liberty to slight or reject such things, as if they were “the word of man,” but ought to take them to their hearts as they are in truth, “the word of God*” himself; a message clothed with his authority, and which must be received with the “obedience of faith‡.”—“See then that ye refuse not him that speaks,—for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven§;” and this the great “apostle of our profession¶” really does, by the lips of his ministers, when they preach “the truth as it is in Jesus||.” In fine, you owe your minister your prayers, fervent and continual prayers for him, that he may prosper in soul and body, and that he may be greatly useful to your souls;

† 2 Tim. iv. 3.
§ Heb. xii. 25.

* 1 Thess. ii. 13.
‡ Heb. iii. 2.

‡ Rom. xvi. 26.
|| Eph. iv. 21.

which is virtually praying for yourselves, while you are discharging your duty towards him, and greatly preparing your hearts for a profitable reception of the word at his mouth. And if people made conscience of praying more for their minister, they would experience greater good by his labours. Therefore, "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified †."

3. "Suffer the word of exhortation," when I add, "labour, brethren, to walk not only towards your pastor, but also towards one another in a spirit and temper becoming the gospel."—"Live in peace," and "the God of peace shall be with you:" "walk in love," and "the God of love*" will dwell among you. "Let brotherly kindness§," mutual forbearance, tender sympathy, unity, harmony, charity, all have their free and unlimited scope and sway in your hearts and actions; and you will be an happy people, and your pastor an happy minister. "Watch and pray,||" my christian friends, against all degrees of captiousness and conceit, pride and self-will.—These are the snares of the devil in which many a promising professor hath been taken and ruined, Captiousness! what is that? but, to set up for correctors of others in what we need to be much better instructed ourselves; and what is self-will? but, to persist in having our own way, though destitute of all proper reason to support it.—These are the fruits of pride, that pernicious vice of the mind, which destroys much good, and is often the inlet to the worst of evils. Errors, heresies, wrathful debates, a breach of affection and of

† 2 Thess. iii. 1.

* 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

Eph. v. 2.

§ 2 Pet. i. 7.

|| Mat'h. xxvi. 41.

christian communion have all their baleful origin from this one source. Watch carefully therefore against these things. Let every one watch his heart in the fear of God, or in our apostle's words, "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled†." But to close the whole,

4. "Labour, my dear friends, after a conscientious, strictly holy and ornamental walk in all things, as in the sight of God our Father." Remember his gracious word to the patriarch Abraham, "I am God Almighty," your all-sufficient God, and all-sufficient good in all cases, therefore "walk before me, and be thou perfect*." Endeavour constantly in the strength of Christ to walk before the Lord, in the church, in your families, and in the world as those that "have obtained mercy to be faithful**," as those who are indeed the called of God, "called out of darkness into his marvellous light.§" There will be no real benefit by the gospel, no real communion with God, or consolations of his spirit, no advances in your spiritual stature, no increasing evidence of your interest in his love, nor any such thing as a ripening for glory, where this is not the case. But seeing that we are to "receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace that we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire†."——To all which I add my most fervent prayer, as the conclusion of this "labour of love||," in the apostle's words also¶, "Now

† Chap. xii. 15.

* Gen. xvii. 1.

** 1 Cor. vii. 25.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

† Heb. xii. 28.

|| Heb. vi. 10.

¶ Chap. xiii. 20.

“ the God of peace that brought again from the
 “ dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the
 “ sheep, through the blood of the everlasting co-
 “ venant, make you perfect in every good work
 “ to do his will, working in you that which is
 “ well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ;
 “ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

“ But to close the whole
 “ I labour, my dear friends, with a consol-
 “ tion, richly holy and ornamental walk in all
 “ things, as in the sight of God our Father.”
 Remember his gracious word to the patriarch
 Abraham, “ I am God Almighty,” you all-ful-
 filling God, and all sufficient good in all cases,
 therefore “ walk before me, and be thou per-
 “ fect.” Endeavour constantly in the strength
 of Christ to walk before the Lord, in the obscurity
 of your families, and in the world as though you
 “ have obtained mercy to be faithful.” “ as those
 who are indeed “ called out of
 “ darkness into light.” There will

THE END.

be no real benefit by the gospel, no real comfort
 from with God, or comfort of his love, no
 advances in your holiness, nor any such
 evidence of your inward life, nor any such
 thing as a ripening where this is not
 the case. For seeing we are to “ receive a
 “ kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have
 “ grace that we may love God acceptably with
 “ reverence and godly fear, for our God is a con-
 “ suming fire.” — To all which I add my most
 fervent prayer as the conclusion of this “ labour
 “ of love,” in the apostle’s words above, “ Now



1 Chap. xii. 12.
 2 1 Cor. xii. 12.
 3 Heb. xii. 12.
 4 1 Cor. xii. 12.
 5 Heb. xii. 12.

